

HJR 18 Workgroup Meeting

Thursday August 23, 2012

Locations: Wilmington and Milford DFS Offices (w/Teleconference)

1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington, DE 19805, Rm. #199

247 Northeast Front Street, Milford, DE 19963, Conf. Rm.

In Attendance:

Tania M. Culley, Esq. – Co-Chair
Julia O’Hanlon – Co-Chair
The Hon. William L. Chapman, Jr.
The Hon. Barbara Crowell
Nathan Badell
John Bates
Rodney Brittingham
Jennifer Donahue, Esq.
Sue Dougherty
Shylah Duchicela

Markisha F.
Christina Jones-Bey
Felicia Kellum
Gerard M.
Julie Miller, Esq.
Susan Radecki
Eiontai S.
Tasha Warren
Keith Zirkle

Welcomes & Introductions

Julia O’Hanlon welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Approval of the Minutes

Rodney Brittingham moved to approve the minutes, with Felicia Kellum seconding. All in attendance approved.

Developmentally Appropriate Extended Foster Care – Criteria

The University Of Delaware Institute for Public Administration provided the committee with research focusing on general policies and state examples in the areas of caseworker involvement, self-sufficiency benchmarks, and financial assistance. In addition, possible considerations for Delaware’s system were suggested.

Caseworker Involvement

- Should all casework responsibilities applicable to youth under 18 continue under an “extended care” program?

Rodney Brittingham stated that in the extended care system, those volunteering to stay in the system will have a “closed” case file, meaning DFS will not have mandatory caseworker involvement, but will continue to have independent living (IL) worker involvement. Case workers currently oversee educational opportunities, medical and counseling services, employment, housing, etc., according to Sue Dougherty. Basically, any social services that a youth may need help with, IL supports them.

The committee agreed that IL services will remain the same if care is extended to 21 in Delaware.

- How often should a young adult in an extended-care program meet with their case worker or Independent Living IL provider?

Usually, an IL case worker will see a youth at least once a month, though there is no requirement for all IL providers. Christina Jones-Bey says that People's Place sees their clients twice a month, but feels that it should not be mandated because every IL provider has different needs and time constraints. Contact should be dictated by the provider's contract. Sue and Tasha Warren agree that it should be "as needed", but strongly encouraged it to be once a month. Nate Badell also said it should depend on the youth and their needs, so it should be monthly, and maybe more based on assessment of the youth.

Gerard M. and Markisha F. both stated that IL case workers were extremely beneficial to them and the more times a youth can meet with their case worker, the better. Eiontai S., however, acknowledged once a month contact should be the norm and if the youth needs their case worker, they should contact the worker themselves to show some independence. Judge Crowell agreed and said there should be a graduated system. At first a youth should be required to see a case worker, but after meeting certain benchmarks, the contact decreases.

The committee agreed that IL case workers should make reasonable efforts to have contact with youth at least once a month and as needed.

- Should an agreement that outlines a young adult's goals, parameters, meeting times, personal interests and needs be a required or voluntary condition of being part of an "extended-care" program? Who is responsible for working with youth on this agreement or plan? Is this a team-based approach or between case manager and young adult only?

Felicia stated there should be an agreement, but it should not define if a youth stays in extended care if they do not adhere to the agreement. Right now, case plans are done every six months with youth in IL services. The youth works with their IL provider and anyone else they want in order to create and revise the case plan. Tasha feels that there should be requirements to promote milestones and this falls with self-sufficiency benchmarks. Eiontai said planning meetings are helpful to him and others in mapping out next steps in life. Felicia agreed and said every housing option (foster homes, Life Lines, dorms, etc.) all have different requirements and expectations that should not be dictated by DFS.

The committee agreed that the current IL case plan and housing option requirements are enough to suffice an agreement and parameters for extended care.

Self-Sufficiency Benchmarks

- When should a foster care youth or young adult in extended care start receiving training, coaching, and other guidance related to self-sufficiency (housing options and interests, financial literacy & budgeting, etc.)?

Tania Culley and Jen Donahue spoke about the benchmarks already in place through IL providers ("the blue book"). This was reviewed in the last two years. IL Providers use the Ansell Casey life skills assessment on clients. The assessment is completed when a youth enters IL care and usually not completed again. Sue said that is not the most helpful because the youth self-report on the assessment. It needs improvement. Judge Crowell wanted to make sure Health Education and Maintenance were a part of the benchmarks.

- Should young adults in extended care be required to undergo a life skills assessment? If so, when should this occur?

Jen stated there were IL provider benchmarks, from at least 2008, that should be revived. Judges should go through them at hearings.

The committee agreed that the DYOI Transitions working group should look at both the IL provider benchmarks and the blue book to develop protocol on self-sufficiency benchmarks for both youth in extended care and IL workers.

Financial Assistance

- Should financial assistance options and rates vary depending on circumstances?

According to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, there should be different options and rates depending on circumstances. Much of this would be tied to housing options and self-sufficiency benchmarks.

The committee agreed that financial assistance options and rates should vary depending on circumstances.

- Should young adults in extended care receive a stipend in addition to maintenance fees?

The committee agreed that young adults in extended care should receive a stipend in addition to maintenance fees.

- What kind of financial literacy training programs should youth undergo during extended care and who is responsible for overseeing this happens?

Julie Miller spoke about Delaware Youth Opportunities Initiative's (DYOI) Opportunity Passport™ program and the need for strong financial literacy programs in Delaware. Currently, IL providers are doing a good job with financial literacy programs in place, but with Opportunity Passport™, those programs can be expanded. Many of the financial literacy programs, like \$tand By Me, are working with DYOI to bring Opportunity Passport™ to Delaware. Eiontai thinks these programs are extremely important and would like to see them tied into stipends, so there is an expectation put on the youth. Tasha said all youth need to be oriented about financial literacy. Julie added that there would be a number of different financial literacy options, so the youth and IL provider can pick the program best suited for the youth.

The committee agreed that stipends, based on assessment, would be given to youth only if they have taken part in some form of financial literacy program or expanded services, with an opt-out provision for good cause.

Next Steps

All voting members, those that have been officially appointed to the taskforce, must come to the next meeting. Official votes will be taken on the issues of eligibility, legal involvement, re-entry, housing, caseworker involvement, self-sufficiency benchmarks, and financial assistance, as well as any other outstanding issue.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING –

All meetings will take place at Wilmington and Milford DFS Offices (w/Teleconference):

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- **Thursday, September 6, 2012 –4:00 pm**